

**Proposed Higher Education Admissions Standards  
Summary of Public Comments from Five Hearings and  
Open Comment Period (mail, telephone, e-mail) through May 20, 2005**

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***Most people expressed support for the goal of improving students' preparation for college through more rigorous high school course work, particularly in mathematics.***

There was widespread support for the goal of a broad, diverse population of students earning college degrees. There was also strong support for the need to improve student preparation as a way of ensuring success in college. Many expressed appreciation for the board's initiative to open the discussion on minimum admission standards to the public.

Several people testified that rigorous work by more high school students would better prepare them for college. Many – particularly faculty from community colleges and universities, business and industry representatives, and parents – expressed dismay at the level of preparation that students currently receive.

There was widespread agreement on the need to increase the rigor of preparation in the high school years, particularly in mathematics. Many noted that too many students are not taking math in their senior year – and some are not taking math in either the eleventh or twelfth grades. Some said the problem is not that students have not studied math, but that many have not studied math recently – and that if math coursework is not included in the senior year, many students forget what they have learned. University representatives particularly emphasized the importance of students studying math and quantitative reasoning during the fourth year of high school. A university admissions officer explained that it would not make sense for an athlete to get ready for a track meet by practicing diligently and then laying off a long time right before the race, yet this is what many students are doing with math studies. Many said the proposed admission standards would be an important step in changing this situation.

Several K-12 and university representatives noted that most students are already meeting the proposed minimum admission standards at the universities, and the public universities are already accepting students who by and large meet this requirement. There was widespread concern that all students, however, must know about these requirements in order to ensure equitable opportunity.

***The majority of business and industry representatives, many speaking on behalf of business associations, spoke about the dearth of Washington students entering careers in engineering, science, and technology.***

Business/industry speakers indicated they are importing too much of their workforce from outside the state; primarily because of a lack of preparation by Washington students in math and science. Speakers testified that Washington high schools are not keeping up, nor is the U.S. as a whole preparing students with adequate skills in math and science – compared to many other nations. Some suggested that Washington needs to upgrade its

academic requirements as several other states have done, or are in the process of considering. In addition, numerous other countries have higher requirements than are typical in American high schools. Speakers contended that jobs requiring technical knowledge are increasing four times faster than others, and if our students are not fully prepared, we will lose out to many other countries that are rapidly increasing the education level of their workforce. Representatives of high-technology businesses expressed particular support for the board's proposals, noting the importance of a better-educated workforce, especially in science, math, and technology.

There was widescale agreement that Washington should increase its academic requirements, and that the proposed minimum admission standards would be a positive step forward. In addition, speakers noted that students and their parents must be told – beginning in the middle-school years – about the importance of math and science coursework in high school.

***Several K-12 superintendents and principals, particularly from rural schools, expressed concern about the effect of the proposed minimum admission standards on staffing.***

There was widespread concern that schools would not have enough well-qualified instructors to teach the additional courses in math and science that would be needed to meet the new requirements. Finding certified teachers is already a problem for small districts. Of particular concern is the need to ensure that if the plan goes forward, that teachers are fully prepared to provide the additional coursework. Furthermore, it would likely take high schools more time than is planned in the 2008 timeline to sufficiently increase their staffing.

Several K-12 educators expressed concern about the need for universities to increase their preparation of new math and science teachers.

Many who testified noted that the need to provide remedial courses at the high schools for students who do not pass the WASL could limit the number of faculty available to teach additional math courses. The concern was also expressed that because the additional math requirement would take effect in 2008 – the first year Washington students would be required to pass the WASL in order to graduate – a focus on higher-level math coursework could reduce the extra assistance available to these students.

Some indicated that the proposal could create an increased need for career guidance in K-12 if the new standards had a negative effect on career and technical education.

***K-12 career and technical education directors and several parents raised concerns about the potential effect on career and technical education.***

Some who testified addressed the issue of high school students who are not college bound but are more interested in moving directly and quickly into the workforce. If the board's proposal were adopted and the new admission standards became, in effect, the 'de facto'

high school curriculum in the state, more students might drop out of school, or be unable to participate in occupational training pathways.

Many people expressed concern that additional math, science and college-prep coursework would not allow for electives – particularly the career and technical education courses that are so important to many students. There was widespread support for preserving the strengths of career and technical education; particularly from parents, career and technical education staff, school principals, and the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board.

Career and technical education program directors suggested that the board's proposal could result in a serious decline in high schools' ability to offer career and technical education, particularly through Skills Centers. Because Skills Centers typically require a commitment of three periods out of the day, these students would have a more difficult time scheduling both career and technical coursework, along with the three core courses called for in the proposal. Rural schools indicated that they would be particularly affected by this change.

Many career and technical education directors suggested that school districts should have the authority to determine whether their elective courses in career and technical education programs would be able to satisfy the academic core requirements (e.g., applied physics, applied math). This authority would help offer additional choices for students and enable many more to meet their college requirements in courses in which they could apply their math and science knowledge and skills.

***A number of those who testified raised concerns that the revised admission standards would lead to increased “tracking” of students – into either “college bound” or “non-college bound,” which could create additional barriers for students.***

Several people testified that under current practices in some high schools, students who do not appear to be college bound are often moved into career or vocational programs, which results in “tracking” students as either college bound or non-college bound. Efforts to develop career and technical education programs that are academically rigorous and move students from high school to two-year colleges have helped reduce tracking and have better prepared students for the needs of the workforce. There is concern, however, that implementation of the proposed minimum admission standards could lead to a return to tracking over time, because career and technical education programs could diminish as scarce resources are moved to academic core courses. Some testified that the revised standards could result in high school counselors advising students out of career and technical education if they are “perceived” to be college bound.

Several people noted that one long-term result of the proposed standards could be an increased high school drop-out rate, particularly if students who are at risk of dropping out or have dropped out and re-entered the education system perceive a lack of relevant courses, or a lack of courses that are geared toward alternative learning styles.

Some people noted that many students would see themselves falling behind as they moved through high school, and could lose hope of ever attending college. Others expressed concern that the revised standards might limit opportunities for students who are late bloomers.

Several people expressed concern that the revised admission standards would negatively affect disadvantaged communities, particularly students of color. Some people noted that when we make it more difficult for certain groups of students (who may not come through the pipeline as readily as others) to have access to needed courses, we will be faced with issues of equitability and equal opportunity.

Some expressed the need to look at improving K-12 and early education systems so that children are better prepared to meet higher standards long before high school. To implement these standards without giving students the tools they need to achieve the standards seemed presumptuous to some who testified – particularly in disadvantaged communities where children are denied many of those tools at an early age.

***Most K-12 educators urged the board to delay the effective date of the new rules until 2010.***

The issue expressed most frequently concerned the timing of the proposed change. The board's proposal would make the new standards effective for students graduating from high school in 2008. The class of 2008, this year's ninth graders, is also the first high school class that must pass the WASL in order to graduate. There was widespread agreement that it would be unfair to change the rules for these students in midstream.

Numerous K-12 educators indicated that high schools do not have sufficient time to make the changes needed to respond to the board's proposal of more rigorous standards. Frequently mentioned examples of significant changes that high schools would need to make to respond to the proposed admission standards included: 1) adding new courses in math and science; 2) adding more staff; 3) informing students and parents of the changes; and 4) reallocating resources.

Several high school superintendents and principals explained that their high schools are currently undergoing reforms as a result of both state and federal (*No Child Left Behind*) requirements. Schools are focused on getting students prepared for the WASL. The State Board of Education has increased high school graduation requirements, and schools are implementing a performance-based system that includes a senior project. High schools are overwhelmed with these changes, and most educators said the proposed timeline is simply too short.

A majority of those who offered testimony recommended that the board delay action until at least 2010, to give 'due notice' of the change while helping assess schools' capacity to provide students the opportunity to meet the revised standards. Many advised the board that if the plan is implemented too quickly, it will not succeed.

Many people called for putting off the decision about any implementation date until further study, citing numerous school reform initiatives that are currently being implemented in Washington's schools, and noting the state is just beginning to see the positive outcomes of those actions. Several people advised the board to slow down its process to allow time to assess the current initiatives – before new initiatives (and potentially unfunded mandates) are put into place.

Some people did acknowledge the board is being asked to be sensitive to concerns, but should be aware that there is never a good time for changes such as these.

***A number of people addressed the issue of remediation, raising questions about the extent of the problem and the need, therefore, to make changes in the standards at this time. Others provided considerable anecdotal evidence about the severity of the problem, calling for revisions in the current admission standards as a needed remedy.***

Some speakers contended that students will require less remediation if they complete the coursework called for in the proposed minimum admission standards, especially in math. They called for the implementation of more rigorous standards for this reason.

Most K-12 representatives contended that remediation is primarily a concern of the two-year colleges, and that only a small percentage of students who enroll in the four-year universities need remediation. For this reason, they opposed moving to more rigorous standards, particularly in math, at this time.

By contrast, several university spokespersons contended that remediation is a serious concern for their institutions, and that many students do come to them requiring remediation. And, students select college majors and future career options based in large part on their preparation. Some students cannot enter careers that require higher math preparation, closing doors that could have remained open had students completed more math in high school.

Some community college faculty noted that remediation in the community college system is simply not as effective as they would like it to be. For some students, the first year of college is too late to catch up if they are not adequately prepared in math. Once a student passes a certain window of opportunity, the data indicates that they will never do as well.

Some people spoke about the occupational programs at community colleges (such as dental hygiene, electronics, and nursing) that do require a significant amount of math preparation. Students and their parents must be advised about this. An 'open admissions policy' at the two-year colleges does not mean there is open admission into specific degree programs at the two-year colleges.

Some who offered testimony – particularly community college and high school math teachers – recommended that high schools offer 'refresher math' in the senior year

without requiring the higher level of math attainment that the policy calls for as a way of easing the remediation problem.

[This testimony revealed a misunderstanding in the board's proposal, which would allow high schools the authority to determine which courses would satisfy core course requirements for college admission. This type of course could potentially be offered to meet the fourth year math requirement once students have completed the required level of math; which is the current intermediate algebra II level.]

***Many questioned the board's credit-based (seat-time) standards, as the state is currently moving to competency-based standards.***

Several people noted that the proposed minimum admission standards call for increasing “credits” in math and other college preparatory courses – which amounts to a seat-time requirement at the very time we should be moving toward competency-based standards. Several K-12 educators called for school districts to have the ability to determine the equivalency options for students to obtain essential academic skills through competency-based approaches.

Some asked for college readiness standards with input from the universities, and referenced the HECB's earlier work on competency-based standards.

***Several high school principals, teachers, and counselors indicated that the high schools need clarification of what constitutes a college core course (college preparatory courses).***

Many K-12 educators raised concerns about high schools’ applied courses – such as in the Tech Prep curriculum – asking whether the schools or universities should determine equivalency. If the proposal goes forward, course equivalency must be considered and clarified during implementation. Many applied courses should count as academic core courses. Several people asked for clarification about what is an algebra-based science course.

There were concerns that the requirements were calling for *year-long courses*, and that this would be incompatible with many high school schedules. Many high schools have moved into block scheduling in which they offer 90-minute courses, enabling students to complete year-long courses in half-year sequences.

[This testimony revealed a misunderstanding in the board's proposal. The board changed its terminology from “year-long courses” as used at the December board meeting, to “credits” as used in the proposed rules presented at the January meeting. Some respondents requested that the board clarify the confusion between requiring a year-long course vs. a unit or credit.]

***Several of those who offered testimony, particularly high school counselors, raised concerns about the effect of the proposed minimum admission standards on dual-credit programs.***

K-12 educators and some parents noted that more of their students are beginning algebra in the pre-high school years, which puts them on a faster track to complete math requirements in high school. It is not unusual for a student to complete requirements through intermediate algebra by the sophomore year. Some people asked how to plan for these students under the proposed standards – whether through Advanced Placement, Running Start, or other alternatives. Running Start particularly affects the state's community colleges, so more dialogue will be needed if courses are to be expanded to accommodate students who wish to pursue a more rigorous, earlier preparation.

***Many expressed concern that the emphasis on core courses would result in fewer students able to take elective courses in the arts – such as music and drama.***

Several high school principals spoke about their strong arts programs and the negative effect the proposed standards would have on these programs down the road, as resources would have to be allocated away from these courses in order to expand math and science coursework, and as students would have less time for electives. They noted that high schools will have to increase their math staff, which will likely create reductions in other areas and could shift resources away from the arts.

Many parents commended the arts programs in which their children are involved, and raised concerns about how students would be able to participate in arts courses given potential scheduling conflicts with the increased academic core requirements.

***There was strong interest from all sectors in joint action planning and collaborative efforts to support K-12 and higher education planning and implementation.***

Several K-12 representatives cited the need for more opportunities to discuss issues around college preparation with the colleges and universities. Many recommended that the board hold off on changes to minimum admission standards until there has been extensive discussion – including on-site at high schools across the state with students, parents, teachers, administrators, and school board members. The impact on the high schools will be serious and the board must take the schools into consideration as part of the proposal. Many noted that this is a K-20 issue, rather than a K-12 issue.

Many in the K-12 community criticized the board for not communicating proposed changes early enough, and not engaging them in a dialogue. However, many individuals indicated that there was an extensive process to develop the proposal for new minimum admission standards that included state education agencies and boards, representatives from the six public baccalaureate institutions, the State Math Council, Partnership for Learning, individual school counselors, principals, teachers, registrars from higher education institutions, and business/industry groups.

Many people supported having standards that clearly communicate the universities' entrance requirements, which would help students prepare better in high school. A clear, well communicated policy is needed for all students and their parents. Some people noted that while many students say they plan on going to college, they don't take enough courses to truly prepare for that decision. We need to clearly communicate what the standards are.

There was widespread concern that the board's policy will not get to students early enough to make a difference. Students and parents need information as early as middle school to facilitate their understanding of the importance of solid academic preparation to prepare for future success in college and the workforce. More statewide attention should be given to various communication tools to get to students earlier. Also, the proposal does not sufficiently speak to pre-high school students.

***Some people raised concerns that it would be difficult to fit all these courses in for the average student on an Individual Education Plan (special education) or a 504 plan (disabled students) along with WASL requirements.***

Some respondents indicated the proposed standards would inequitably affect some students who already are having a hard time fitting in all the classes they need – along with WASL requirements; specifically special education and disabled students.

***Some K-12 educators raised concern about the need for the universities to raise the current 15 percent waiver in order to enroll freshman who may be deficient in their completion of academic core courses, but who would otherwise have the capability to enter and likely succeed in college.***

No speakers from the universities called for raising the 15 percent threshold for freshman admission, as they currently do not come close to using their 15 percent allowance. For students who have special interests (such as art or music), the baccalaureate institution representatives noted they have always been able to review alternative circumstances, and the institutions will continue to give those students a chance. The colleges want to admit better prepared students who can succeed. These changes will force a comprehensive review by the universities of the student, to look at the whole student and not just grades.

***There was widespread support to eliminate the Admission Index.***

No one testified in favor of retaining the Admission Index. Many people indicated that we have emphasized grades and test scores too much in the past, and that what is most important is a rigorous curriculum. K-12 teachers and parents especially noted that students worry about their GPA too much, and we need policies that encourage students to take more difficult courses.